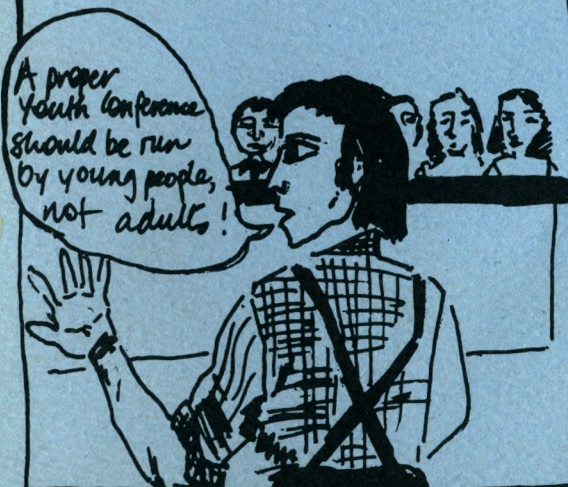


# NO.3 THE L.I.P. CAMPAIGN



## NATIONAL YOUTH CONFERENCE



A proper  
youth conference  
should be run  
by young people,  
not adults!



We've got to  
stand up for  
ourselves!



We must  
fight for our  
rights!



Words are cheap  
but action is  
expensive!

Organize  
and mobilize  
the low  
income  
community!

We've seen all  
talk. It's time  
to act!

The future  
can be  
ours!



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362.82 LIP

# THE L.I.P. CAMPAIGN



arc

# THE L.L.S. CAMPAIGN

THE  
L.L.S.

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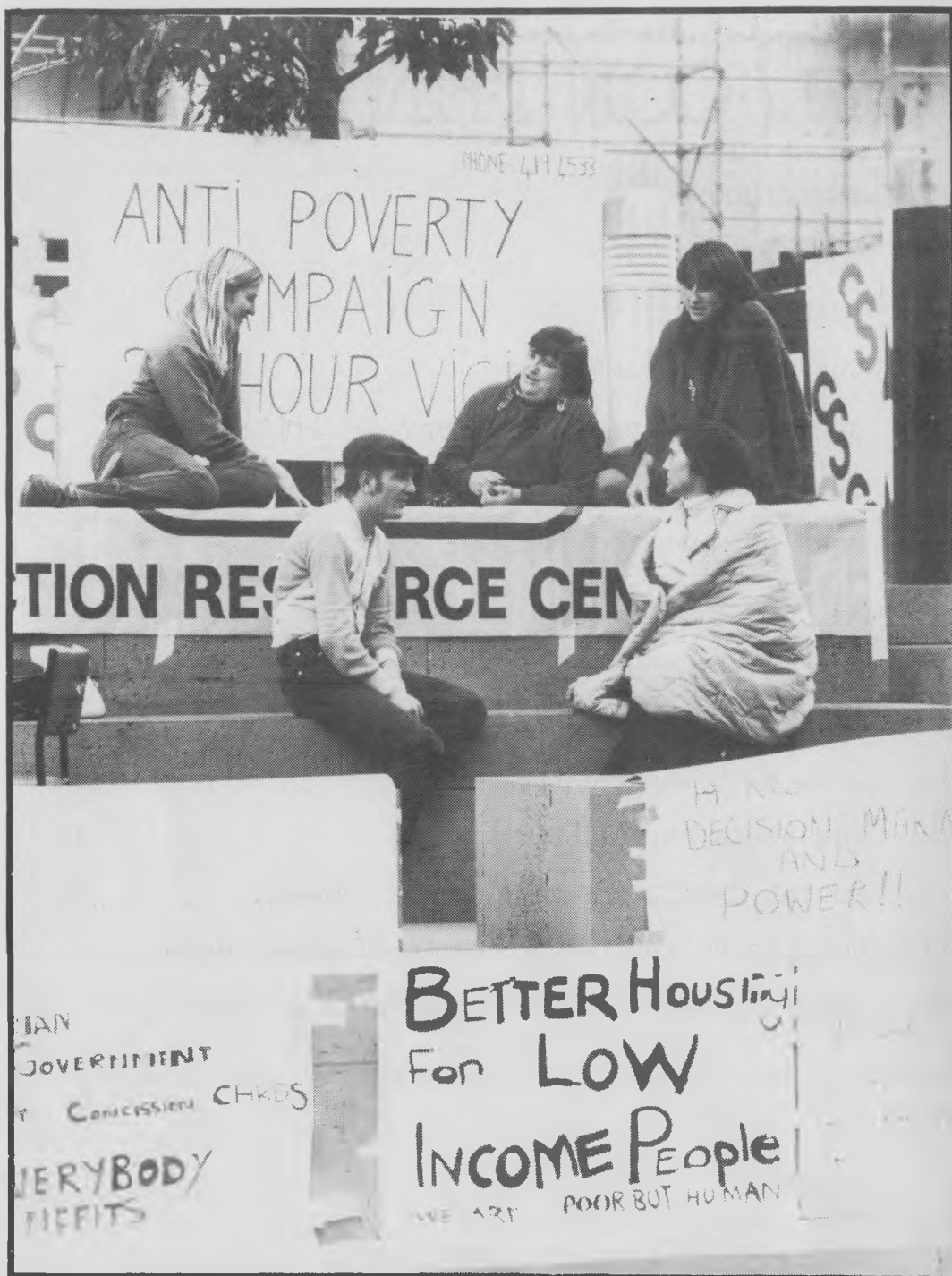


photo courtesy of The Age

# INTRODUCTION

This publication records ARC's experiences of and reflections on social action during 1979.

Throughout the text "we" and "us" frequently appears because the different sections have been written, individually or jointly, by actual participants. We've retained this because it personalises and humanises the issues.

We've done a lot more social action than we've ever done before. We're much more aware now of the desirability and possibility of social action for social change.

If our social action has any definable characteristics it's based on team work and group decision-making, it's non-violent and it's directed at "them" who make the decisions about "us".

Social action is controversial. It offends many people - including people at ARC. Disagreements occur about the desirability of social action and particular forms of social action. How far social action will go and the form it will take in the future is as unresolved as is the future of ARC.

While the policies are ARC's views as an organisation, it is recognised that individual staff and members have their own views which may or may not agree with the policies. ARC attempts to practice democracy. While the organisation now has its own official policies, we respect the right of individuals to different and differing views and who should, therefore, have the right to express those views - even at forums at which ARC's official views are being presented.

*When we all start agreeing we'll all stop growing.*

Judy Cassar  
Social Action Worker.

# WHO ARE THE L.I.P?

*People on pensions and benefits - all of which are below the poverty line.*

*People on low wages which are below the poverty line - poor despite the fact they are working.*

*People who have no income because they're ineligible for assistance, they don't know they're eligible or they're eligible but don't apply because they don't want to be stigmatised.*

Money is one's most important basic need. Yet, the income of a low income person is irregular and inadequate. This means there is no stable accommodation, no education, no skills and no job. It is one big wheel with nothing at the end.

# WHAT IS A.R.C?

ARC is the Action and Resource Centre for Low Income Families.

The Centre, situated in Fitzroy, was set up in 1972 as the Family Centre Project by the Brotherhood of St Laurence. Between 1972 and 1975 ARC was run by professionals. Since 1975 the Centre has taken a great leap forward and employed non-professional low income people who have gradually taken over the running of ARC. The majority of the staff are now non-professionals.



The workers come from low income backgrounds so they understand the problems and feelings of low income people, e.g., being evicted, having no food, having the gas cut off, not being able to pay for school excursions and being put down by voluntary agencies.

Who can join ARC? Families on pensions or benefits, families working who are on low incomes and families who have no income. The only requirement is that you are a low income family that wishes to take part in the life of the Centre.

ARC aims to build a power base for low income people by defending their rights and developing ways of creating change through news releases, demonstrations, meetings with politicians, publications and talks.

## WHY THE L.I.P CAMPAIGN?



Low income people are called the poor by the politicians, the educationalists, the social workers and other professionals and they all make promises which sound good and give us the feeling that they are doing something. As time goes on, however, the promises prove to be empty and feelings become soured - as always, the low income people become the forgotten people.

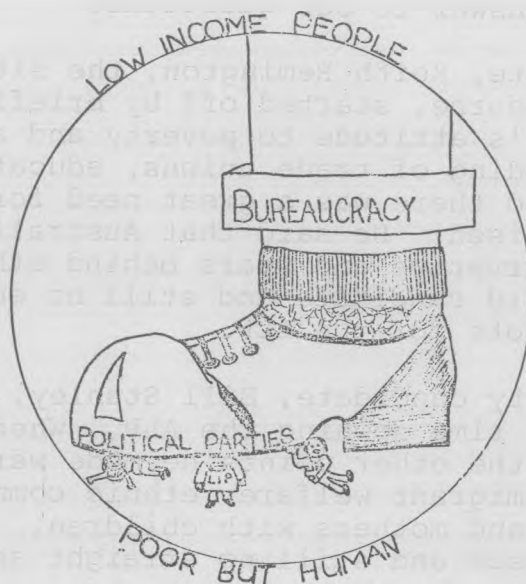
We realise that poverty can't be eliminated simply by relying on high income people providing services and applying band aids. High income people are all talk and that's as far as they go. It's because many in our society want to believe that low income people are poor through their own fault. The general attitude is that low income people are "no-hopers" and wouldn't have anything to contribute anyway. High income people don't believe in giving low income people the opportunity to control their own lives. Instead, they make the decisions on what they think is best for low income people. Because of such communitiy attitudes low income people are not able to accept themselves as human beings.

*People are low income through no fault of their own. The fault is the system and not that of the victim. It is necessary for us to get out into the community and fight for our rights. Low income people must become assertive, active and political and that's what the LIP Campaign is all about - low income people assertively, actively and politically fighting for their rights.*

# A.R.C'S FIRST POLITICIANS DAY.

1979 was an election year in Victoria and ARC decided to run an election campaign. One of our steps in the campaign was to get a candidate from each of the four parties contesting the Melbourne electorate to tell us why low income people should vote for them and their particular party. The subsequent meeting became known in ARC as "ARC's Politicians Day".

Before the eventful day, in letters we specifically requested that each candidate put forward their party's policies regarding low income people and why they believed that low income people should vote for them. Did they do this? Do politicians ever do what they are asked?



Finally the day came and we were all primed and ready to go. We soon found out that our four candidates had not prepared at all, did not do as we had requested in our letters, and well and truly gave us a feeling of *"this is ONLY a group of low income people who won't understand anyway and it will be a breeze to get through!"* But, ARC knew what it was on about and we weren't going to let the candidates off the hook. We believed in the issues and we were representing all low income people.

The Australian Democrats candidate, Trevor Cooke, briefly mentioned the issues of unemployment and fighting inflation. He spoke about indexation of pensions and benefits, free transport for all unemployed outside peak hours and de-bureaucratising the welfare system. No mention of why he believed we should vote for him.

The Communist Party candidate, Phil Herrington, spoke on issues affecting the ordinary working class, how the Liberals give things as handouts and why the communists are concerned about other consequences of poverty and priorities in society. Again, no mention of an answer to our questions.

The ALP candidate, Keith Remington, the sitting member for Melbourne, started off by briefly talking about his party's attitude to poverty and a grass roots understanding of trade unions, education and health. He said there was a great need for people to become organised. He said that Australia as a whole was conservative and years behind other countries. Third candidate and still no emphasis on why we should vote for the ALP.

The Liberal Party candidate, Bill Stanley, spent the majority of his time downing the ALP. When he had finished this, the other points he made were mainly concerned with migrant welfare, ethnic communities, single mothers and mothers with children. The last candidate to speak and still no straight answers to our questions.

Although some of the points made did relate to low



income people, we felt they were not stressed strongly enough and that the candidates were all talk and no action.

Q: "What are you going to do about travel concessions?"

A: "Mr..... is working on it."

A: "I can't answer that question."

General responses to specific questions were typical. None of the speakers was specific about low income people. It was surprising that they had not prepared. One member of ARC stood up and said, "Why don't you all get off your fat asses and get something done! The issues that concern us are not only election issues, but are there all the time."

## THE A.R.C VIGIL.



The highlight of our election campaign was the ARC vigil. On Monday, the 30th April, after much preparation and co-operation, our five day 24 hour Anti-Poverty Vigil commenced on the steps of Parliament House. From Parliament House we marched unannounced down Bourke Street to the City Square - staying there until Friday lunchtime.

We were hopeful that the media coverage would be adequate and that our points would be put across and relayed out there, somewhere, into the comfortable houses of the high income earners. Our hope was that something of the issues would sink into the minds of perhaps some of the community. We weren't relying on the media, however, because the vigil would be very public and central. We would be distributing our own leaflets - by the end of the vigil over 12,000 had been distributed. The public could not help themselves but notice our presence. For many members of the public they could not avoid us at least twice a day every day.

We hoped to create community awareness that poverty did exist and that we were no longer sitting back and taking the way of life handed to us by society. Now, for the first time, we the low income people were ready to stand up and fight for our rights as existing human beings. Low income people want to be accepted not as scum living out of the pockets of the taxpayers, but as human beings struggling to survive.

VIGIL means to be devoted to something, to give up something you normally wouldn't (for example, to get your point across you give up your sleep), to fight for an idea or a cause. To put it another way, if you take each letter of the word VIGIL, you will find out what you have achieved with the end result:

*V for Victory*  
*I for Initiative*  
*G for Growth*  
*I for Independence*  
*L for Learning and Living.*

We drew up a roster for the week broken up into two

## POLL COUNTDOWN

### Plea for action on the poor

THE State Government and other political parties were discriminating against low-income people, it was claimed yesterday.

The chairman of the Action and Resource Centre for Low Income Families at Fitzroy, Mrs. ...

### The poor push parties

The political parties facing up to the May 5 State election are about to get some lip from people who say they have been forgotten.

LIP stands for low income people. They say their numbers are increasing because of unemployment and inflation.

Low income people now make up about 7 per cent of Victorians, according to the Action Resource Centre for Low Income Families at Fitzroy.

The centre is mounting a 24 hour day vigil in the City Square from April 30 until May 4.

### FOUR-DAY VIGIL IN CITY

The Action and Resource Centre will hold a four day hour vigil in the city this week to publicise its campaign for more benefits for low income people.

The vigil will be on a 24 hour basis starting at Victoria Station and ...

moving down to the city square. Spokesperson Judy Casati said the vigil would try to draw attention to public transport issues like the high cost of ...

She said supporting mothers and unemployed people should have special discounts as well as discounts for the elderly and invalid pensioners.

## The State election

### ROUND-THE-CLOCK VIGIL BY 'FORGOTTEN PEOPLE'

### The poor seek a better deal

Members of Fitzroy's Action Resource Centre are maintaining a round-the-clock vigil in the Melbourne City Square to fight for the rights of low-income earners.



... children to ... Part-time jobs were scarce, so students could not support themselves.

"We want to be able to bring up our children in a better way than they won't be unemployed in the future," she said.

But she and the group was not just after money. "The point is we want to tell the community we are not poor," she said.

hour shifts. We eventually filled the whole roster but not without difficulty. We had some people on standby to fill in when rostered people couldn't and didn't turn up. But, most of the rostered people were also able and willing to continue beyond their rostered hours. Whether or not they were needed some people were happy to roster themselves for 12-18 hours. There was a gritty determination to keep the vigil going.

Initially, the weather was very windy. As the week progressed, the weather deteriorated from being windy to raining. Initially, we found it necessary to tape down our placards to the surface of the City Square. Council workers approached us, demanding that we remove the tape from the placards as nothing was to be fixed to any surface of the Square. The problem was resolved by putting heavy stones on the placards to keep them in position.

When the rain started we erected a canvas awning to protect us from the rain. We fixed the awning to a tree overnight and the next morning the Council workers demanded that we remove the rope from the tree and warned us that any further fixing of things to the Square would result in the cancellation of Council permission for the vigil.

During the day we overcame Council harrassment by

16  
resorting to stones and a bucket of sand to hold the awning in position and at night after the Council workers had gone home, the canvas was reattached to the tree. It was removed at 6.00a.m. the next morning.

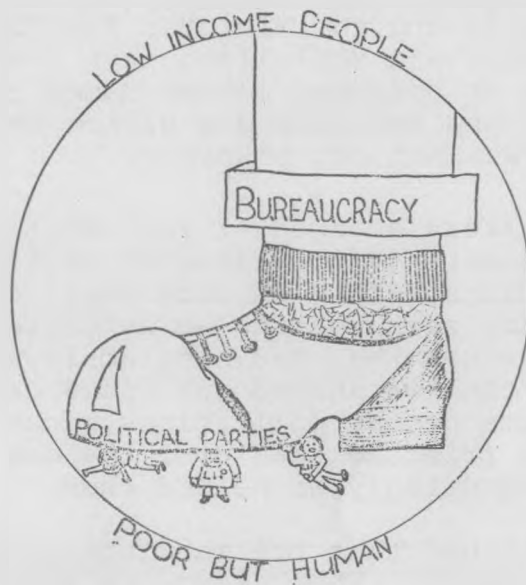
Rain, hail and shine and wind didn't prevent people from turning up for their shifts. Even volunteers for the 2.00 a.m. and 6.00 a.m. stretches were not put off by the elements. Getting wet and cold just seemed to increase our solidarity and determination to continue. Numerous people offered their help and services to ensure the success of our vigil. Food and drinks were donated and often brought unasked. The police brought us the newspapers in the early hours of each morning. The atmosphere of the vigil was a feeling of self-esteem and of determination to show the politicians and the public what we were doing. The feeling was one of "we will fight together" and everyone involved was determined to see it through to the end.

The response from the public overall was great. We opened their eyes that we were fighting a just and worthy cause and we received some comments like: *"Keep up the good work," "Good luck", "I am with you"* and some people wanted to know what they could do to help. We did have some comments like: *"dole bludgers", "get out and do some work". "stop wasting the taxpayers money"* and one passerby called out from a car, *"You are a bunch of fucking lesbians."* Such comments can only be from people who don't really understand the living conditions of low income people. If we are still willing to make a stand after such comments, then what we are fighting for is worthwhile.

We found that people did listen and we did put into their minds what we were trying to achieve. It was a good learning experience of how to fight for something and to fight with confidence. After five days thousands of people had spoken with us, read our leaflets and placards, and saw us. Although the overall media coverage was limited, we succeeded in communicating our message to thousands of people. We set out to have a vigil and we had our vigil.



# MORE AND MORE POLITICIANS.



To the politicians income security, emergency aid, housing and employment only seem to be important issues at election time. To low income people these issues are important every day whether there is an election or not. So to make this clear to politicians and to familiarise them with our policies we decided to invite more politicians to ARC.

In preparation for their visits preliminary meetings were held to allocate the jobs of meeting the politicians on their arrival, chairing the meetings and selecting spokespersons for particular policies. The chosen and available policies were emergency aid, income security, an indigenous workers employment program and travel concessions. Arrangements were also made to videotape the meetings.

So far the following politicians have visited ARC: Peter Ross-Edwards, leader of the National Party, Frank Wilkes, Leader of the ALP; Don Chipp, Federal Parliamentary Leader of the Australian Democrats; Walter Jona, Minister for Community Welfare Services; Pauline Toner, Shadow Minister for Community Welfare Services; and Steve Crabb, the Shadow Minister for Transport. Invitations have also been made to the Premier, Rupert Hamer; the Minister for Transport, Robert McClelland; and the Minister for Housing, Brian Dixon. Both Hamer and McClelland have responded negatively - in an unsigned letter Hamer replied that he was too busy and McClelland's office wrote saying that a meeting was not yet possible.

A noticeable pattern emerged at each meeting. It was a pattern that we weren't conscious of at first and it took a few meetings before we were aware of what was happening. After each meeting we attempted to get together and discuss what had been achieved. It was at these meetings that we shared our views and that our common criticisms of the politicians began to surface. Each politician tried to take over the meetings in their own ways and unknowingly we helped them.

They all established that the meetings were primarily for information exchange. When arguments either loomed or developed, the politicians side-stepped the issue or said they did not come to argue. The politicians put off making commitments and we weren't sure what line to take. We probably did better when we got into an argument but we either didn't press it or we didn't know how to press it. One politician didn't like a question, claimed that it was rude and threatened to leave unless we stayed "polite". We stayed, as we had been, polite.

In effect, many of the politicians denied the use of a project for low income people. The ALP politicians in particular (Wilkes, Toner and Crabb) asserted that low income people were working class people and did not recognise that although low income people are part of the working class they are affected differently from the rest of the working class. The politicians also claimed their sympathy and/or empathy for low income people. They either adopted the benevolent approach of claiming that

they were always helping low income people or they saw low income people as interesting cases to illustrate their arguments. One politician moved away from policies and started writing a profile of a typical ARC member with questions such as: Do you have holidays? and What kind of food do you buy?

When asked quite specific questions the politicians would sometimes talk about another area. So one politician took the question of travel concessions into the broader issue of access to transport particularly in the outer suburbs. Accidentally or deliberately the politicians missed the point that we were talking about financial access and not geographical access. Generally, however, the examples used by the politicians were irrelevant because they weren't specifically relevant to us.



Our real failure has been our inability to follow up the visits. In a way you can't blame the politicians for not meeting their promises if we can't be bothered following them up ourselves. How serious are we about the policies if we can't be bothered following them up ourselves? How serious are we about the policies if we just wait for the politicians to respond?

At the same time the failure of any of the politicians to follow up any of their promises is significant. It really demonstrates that low income people don't rate with politicians and that they don't regard us as important enough. We shouldn't have to follow up the politicians. They're supposed to be our representatives - and that's the problem because they don't represent low income people.

*We've learnt that politicians still need to be educated about low income people. All the parties pay token-service to low income people. Yet, they all have a responsibility to low income people, to see us as people and to accept that there are issues that only affect low income people. Our experience with politicians is a strong argument for low income people to have their own politicians who aren't middle class. At least with low income politicians we'd feel more entitled to place demands on them, we could relate to them and they couldn't pretend they didn't understand.*

*In the end, most of the politicians shared the same views - whether for moralistic or pragmatic reasons. The moralists sought to help the deserving and avoid or minimise helping the undeserving. The pragmatists said the same thing but claimed this was because of public opinion. They were all concerned about costs and benefits. They were all either outright opposed or unwilling to support the abolition of the work test.*

In evaluating our handling of the politicians, it is obvious that we weren't sufficiently prepared. We didn't always have the answers to the politicians questions and they provided their own answers. We didn't have an answer to the question: When does an indigenous worker stop becoming an indigenous worker?



We just didn't answer the question and that's fatal because it conveys the impression you don't properly understand and you haven't thought through your policy. The answer is that an indigenous worker always remains an indigenous worker.

We failed to see the meetings as power situations and to effectively respond to their debating tricks and techniques. Our response to the politician who was preparing a profile of a typical ARC member was to

answer his questions without objection. We need to understand their debating tricks and techniques. We also need to know more about the political system, the political parties and politicians, their policies, politics and philosophy.

We also weren't disciplined enough. Sometimes people had their own particular things to say which weren't part of what we wanted to say. What they said either wasn't part of the established agenda or it contradicted views already put to the politicians. Either can be and was very unsettling. It put us off our course, used up valuable time and gave the politicians an out and the impression that we didn't know what we believed. Everyone needs to be aware of the issues. But, we also need a strong Chairperson who will assert themselves over the meetings and the politicians who may be too willing to accept an irrelevant question. Too often the different chairpersons allowed meetings to drift, to run over time and to raise irrelevant questions.

Each of the politicians agreed that it was important for low income people to be involved in decision-making. They all agreed to ongoing consultation and agreed to respond to the policies. They all claimed that their visit had been personally useful. One politician, for instance, agreed to forward news releases, raise within the party the involvement of low income people in policy making, regular meetings whenever necessary, a possible meeting with the full parliamentary party and suggested a visit to parliament house. Nothing has been heard from this politician since the visit. But, then, nothing has been heard from the other politicians either.

# TURNING ON THE GAS.

On the 28th June 1979 16 protestors from ARC marched into the city to the Gas and Fuel Corporation's showrooms.

The immediate stimulus for the march was the situation of a woman who could not get her gas meter reinstalled. It was yet another case of another low income person who was having difficulties with the Gas and Fuel Corporation.

It was agreed that the basic problem was that she was low income and that there was a need for the Gas and Fuel Corporation to change its policy towards low income people. The existing policy treats people as individual cases and corporation staff are left to determine whether or not applicants for assistance are deserving or undeserving.



A decision was therefore made to go to the Gas and Fuel Corporation showrooms. The morning of the protest a leaflet was written and photocopied, placards were prepared, a spokesperson appointed and a briefing session held to ensure all the protestors agreed on why the protest was being held and what would be done at the protest.



On entering the showrooms we distributed leaflets to staff and customers. In the meantime, from the showrooms and ARC, telephone calls were being made to the media informing them of our presence.

Senior officials of the Corporation appeared shortly after our arrival and requested several times that we withdraw from the showroom into an auditorium. Several times we requested the officials to withdraw while we debated whether or not to comply with their request. Each time we agreed that we should stay so that we were not isolated from the public and the media and because we wanted a meeting with the Chairman of the Gas and Fuel, Neil Smith.

The officials said that they could not make any promises about a meeting with the Chairman. Another debate ensued, therefore, as to if we held out we might not achieve anything whereas if we withdrew to the auditorium a meeting would take place. By then the media had arrived and this stiffened our decision to remain where we were. We also concluded that the only relevant meeting would be with Neil Smith.

After a while Neil Smith arrived, greeted us warmly, asked what it was all about, made some jokes and agreed to a meeting the next day. Having got our meeting, we left for ARC.

The meeting duly took place on the morning of the 29th June. We emphasised that we were concerned about policy and the need for a change in policy. We were not concerned with individual cases. We stressed that heating and cooking were basic rights. We argued that the level of pensions and benefits was inadequate and that until these were increased organisations such as the Gas and Fuel Corporation should lower costs for low income people. We argued that there were always reasons why people did not pay their gas bills. We argued that because the corporation was in touch with low income people it could and should make a recommendation to the Government. We criticised Smith for fobbing us off and for claiming to know the problems of low income people as well as ARC. The corporation was asked to support a submission to the Government on the need to reduce gas costs to low income people. We also asked for ongoing discussions.

In response, Smith said that policy was for the Government to decide. He said the corporation was always willing to help genuine individual cases and that was the only way to deal with the situation. He agreed that heating and cooking were basic necessities. He also argued that the level of pensions and benefits was inadequate. This was the real problem and not gas bills which had not been increasing in recent years. He said there were people who did not want to pay their gas bills. He said the corporation would not make any submission to the Government but would be willing to comment on the corporation's experience with low income people in response to an ARC submission to the Government. He said

the corporation knew the problems of low income people as well as ARC if not better. He later clarified that this was in reference to gas. He agreed to ongoing discussions with the corporation.

We agreed to disagree.

On the 19th July we went back to the Gas and Fuel



photo courtesy of The Tribune



Corporation showroom. This time we took a petition because we decided we would ask staff and customers to support our demand for policy changes. Before we left for the showroom, three people took on the responsibility of contacting the media. We used a summary of our discussions with Smith as a leaflet and had this typed and photocopied. Others prepared slogans and painted them on placards. We also chose another spokesperson - to rotate the job and confuse the corporation.

Not long after we arrived, Neil Smith and his staff appeared to berate us for not being fair because we had made an agreement to ongoing meetings and had not provided our notes from the previous meeting. He asked us to leave the building and said he could charge us with trespassing and obstruction.

We were worried, but, after discussion, refused to move. We decided that if the police were called we would leave quietly. Again and again we were asked by senior staff if we would like to talk with them in the auditorium. We refused pointing out that we were there to get signatures for our petition.

Then the media arrived and there were more than last time. While our spokesperson and Smith's staff spoke to the media, we collected signatures for the petition. Most of the customers were sympathetic and signed. A few said things like "It's your own fault. People know they have to pay but they avoid it" and "People don't try to help themselves and then cry for help when they're in a tight situation." Most of the staff said, "We'll be sacked", "I couldn't do that" and "No". A few of the staff signed. Most took the leaflet. One hundred and thirty two people signed the petition.

Getting the support of other people was important to us. Going up to people we didn't know and speaking to them about the issues built up our confidence. We were building a closeness between them and us - between the poor and the non-poor. There was one lady who described herself as middle class and signed because she said she was having trouble paying her gas bills. Having the media there also gave us a lot more confidence and probably prevented the police being called. After the media arrived, we were told we could stay provided we didn't block passageways.

*Throughout both protests we adopted a team approach. We elected spokespersons and only allowed those people to speak. We didn't allow ourselves to be provoked. Before we acted we planned what we would do and say. While we were protesting the whole group conferred on every move. Each time we succeeded in hassling the corporation and demonstrated that we weren't easily fobbed off. We realised that meetings in the auditorium would take us away from the public and that is what the corporation wanted to do with us. We also got our message across to the public through the leaflets, the placards, the petition and the media.*

# THE ACOSS CONGRESS.

The Australian Council of Social Service is an Australian-wide lobby group of welfare agencies and the welfare interest. ARC has been involved in ACOSS through attendance at various conferences and meetings and the ARC Social Action Worker is on the ACOSS Board and is ACOSS' nominee on the National Consultative Council on Social Welfare.

Despite this, ACOSS continues to pay token-service to low income people. It remains a battlefield between Commonwealth/Centralist (ACOSS) and State (State Councils of Social Service) interests, between progressive and traditional welfare agencies and between competing ideological perspectives. We decided that at the ACOSS Congress in 1979 we would attempt to convert token-service into real service.

We prepared an ACOSS policy document and selected a group of four delegates. We went through the policy and a strategy to make sure the delegates understood the policy and to cover any objections that might be made at the congress to the policy.

We also decided that the ARC delegates should participate in the same workshop - the self-help workshop. The argument for participation in the self-help workshop was that a commitment of resources to low income and self-help groups was more important than other policy changes. The other workshops included income security, health, community development and employment. It could be argued that by not covering more than one workshop ARC would lose an opportunity to influence policy-making. But, then, at most one other workshop would be covered. This was because we agreed that our delegates should not operate individually.

It was also considered that the decisions of the

# G. NON-GOVERNMENT WELFARE SECTOR

The following motions were passed by Congress as recommendations to the Board of Governors.

- 6.1 (17) A commitment of ACOSS resources should be directed to the State COSS level to work with local self help groups.
- Resources are -  
 - Information (input - output)  
 - practical help (money and skills)  
 - developing different ways of doing things that do not build up organisational structures.  
 - build up organisational structures.

- 6.2 (18) All ACOSS PCC's should formulate their policies from the ground up, not the sky down. This should also be reflected in the State COSS networks.

DO IT  
 HONESTLY  
 OPEN MINDEDLY  
 WILLINGLY

WHATS :

Do it yourself as far as possible e.g. L.I.P. survival booklet as distinct from COSS' doing it.

ACOSS with State COSS to give priorities to ways of encouraging groups from the beginning rather than when they have become 'big'.

Do it WITH PEOPLE rather than FOR PEOPLE (such as the consumer committee that ACOSS worked with in the 'Inquiry into Poverty').

That COSS network negotiate with the ACOSS Board to allow the 'have nots' to attend functions such as this CONGRESS with the 'haves'.

This should include conferences large and small that would benefit the self helpers by PARTICIPATION and the conference decision-making. We would give our skills and knowledge FREE.

Self-help groups should be represented on the decision-making bodies of all COSS levels.

- 6.3 (19) That the ACOSS Board be directed to (a) hold Congress in different states (b) that places, travelling and living expenses for have nots at Congress and Conferences be offered free from the total resources of the COSS network.

The following motions were referred to the Board for consideration and action.

- 6.4 (6A) This Congress requests COSS and National Member Organisations to choose their two delegates to subsequent Congress to select one person who is a user of their service and is low-income and that to make adequate provision for their congress and travelling costs.

That there is a need to establish two or more low income people consumer representatives on every decision making group and body, both government and non government e.g. ACOSS and the COSS network.

self-help workshop could be swamped by the decisions of the other workshops. It was agreed that this might be avoided by fighting against it and that what counted was not so much the policies adopted but who implemented the policies and who had the necessary resources to implement and influence decisions. What was the point of low income people influencing policies so that high income people could implement the policies?

It was also agreed that our delegates should not contradict each other and should meet regularly during the congress.

Our delegates arrived at the congress after an overnight train journey from Melbourne. After a lot of preparatory discussions with other delegates, the

ARC delegates persuaded the self-help workshop participants to agree to calling for LIP representation on decision-making bodies and the establishment of a LIP fund to fund this representation. Similar proposals have been pushed by ARC at previous ACOSS Congresses.

By sheer determination and persistence, by having a coherent and developed argument and by receiving the support of influential delegates we converted the workshop and the congress to our point of view. We provoked a strong debate. We stayed together - backing each other up. We refused to be stampeded into compromise motions proposed by apparent supporters.

Understandably all of us were under a lot of pressure because we were pushing different views from those of the majority of participants. But, also because we were consistent and stuck to those views and its difficult to be consistent when its normal to compromise. But, if we'd compromised we'd have lost our policy.

In some ways we were reinforcing our efforts at the 1978 Congress but this time the proposals were more specifically challenging. We got our motions through the congress and these have been adopted by the Board. It is arguable that it is easy to get anything you want at congress but it all depends on what priority it gets from the ACOSS Board. The election of ARC's Social Action Worker on the Board is critical for this. Only time will tell whether or not ACOSS' definitions and implementations coincide with our intentions.

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## "Useful"

One of the protesters, Miss Gayeline Miller, said: "We don't think a youth conference in Canberra is a proper way to consult youth.

"There should be a survey, then a series of conferences in each state, run by youth and followed by a national youth conference.

"The conference is being run by adults; a proper youth conference should be run by young people.

"Older people think they can speak on behalf of the teenagers of Australia but all they can express is what they read in books and the paper and what they hear on television."

She said it was hard for young people to get jobs without a higher

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# THE NATIONAL YOUTH CONFERENCE.

The Department of Employment and Youth Affairs had decided to hold a National Youth Conference in Canberra. Most of the delegates were selected by the organisers and 90% were middle class, affluent and professional.

The teenagers at ARC believed that low income people were inadequately represented, their views would not be heard at the conference and that a youth conference controlled by adults in Canberra was an inappropriate way to consult youth. It was decided to gate crash the conference.

Two weeks of discussion and planning preceded the departure for Canberra. An alternative policy for consulting youth was prepared as well as policies on education and employment.

After an eight hour bus journey, we arrived in Canberra and headed for a friendly delegate's room at University House where the conference was being held.

We decided that we would stay overnight in the room. Initially, this was a practical suggestion - it was late at night, we were hungry and tired and just didn't have the energy to look for a camping site. But, after a brief discussion, we also decided that strategically it was also desirable. We knew that the next morning the police would surround University House to prevent any demonstrators from entering the premises and disrupting the conference. If we were on the outside, we would not be able to get in and we would be lumped together with other demonstrators

who might have different objectives and tactics. We decided that they could demonstrate from the outside and that we would demonstrate from the inside.

We agreed that we wouldn't crash the conference while Prime Minister Fraser was speaking on the first day. Our target was the conference itself and not Fraser. We wanted to make this clear. There was also the chance that if we appeared while Fraser was speaking that the police would act very quickly to remove us and we would not have the opportunity to put our point of view.

Fraser came and left. Unfortunately, there were still some police patrolling the grounds inside University House and this made us apprehensive about when to move over to the conference. We were relying on the delegates to inform us when the conference was in full session and when the police were out of sight.

While we waited we painted slogans on our placards saying "\$150,000 for what?". "\$150,000 for whom?". "Useful not Useless consultation" and "Youth to decide". During the morning the media visited and interviewed us and everyone became much more adept at explaining why they had come to the conference. Throughout the morning we worked out our strategies. The agreed plan was to:

1. *March into the conference.*
2. *Proceed to the front of the audience.*
3. *Hold the placards above our heads.*
4. *Distribute the leaflets.*
5. *Start chanting, "We demand the right to speak!"*
6. *Request that a nominated speaker be heard.*
7. *Nominated speaker speaks to prepared address.*
8. *Leave the conference - back to our room.*

Finally, it was time to go. We left the room and headed for the conference. The police were 100 yards away at one end of the conference building guarding the main entrance. So, we headed for the

other end hoping we would be able to get through another entrance. We walked past stray representatives and conference administrators. A couple of people asked us to stop and we proceeded faster into the conference. As we entered the conference the room went silent. We marched up to the front and held up the placards to the stunned and fuming delegates. After overcoming their initial surprise and rage, the conference proceeded - trying to ignore us. We had to escalate our disruption. So we began to chant and circulate the leaflets.

Some of the delegates yelled abuse at us, but we stood our ground and continued chanting. This time we provoked a debate. A typical response was a naive 17 year old girl from Darwin who said, "We have problems beside unemployment. Can't we get down and do what we came here to do. I consider you've got a damn big problem. You're not going to solve things by ramming it down our throats."



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ACTION AND RESOURCE CENTRE FOR LOW INCOME FAMILIES

28-9-79

#### PRESS RELEASE

A group of teenagers from the Action and Resource Centre are going to Canberra (uninvited) to attend the Commonwealth Government National Youth Conference from 1st to 5th October.

We don't think a Youth Conference in Canberra is a proper way to consult youth. There should be a series of Youth Conferences in each state run by youth.

We think the National Youth Conference should accept our limitations and agree to spend the conference on how to organize a proper Youth Consultative. The views of the youth of today are being neglected (pushed aside) by the Government. We feel that we should be asked what we want to do instead of being told what to do and that is our main objective in going to this conference.

Also we think that at this conference we are representing not only the views of the teenagers of A.R.C., but those of all teenagers in Australia who want to make their views known to the Australian Government.

We have not been invited to the conference but we are asking to be admitted. The conference is being run by adults. All the main speakers are adults. Adults have picked the topics and issues. There will be some teenagers at the conference, but these do not represent us as they have been selected from a phone-in and are mainly students and teachers. There are only 9 unemployed people who have been invited out of 120 invitations.

#### CONTACT PEOPLE:

Joe Tatnell  
Darlene Miller  
Adrian Halliday  
Malcolm Hearps

Phone 419 4533

An independent project in association with the Brotherhood of St Laurence

## ANGRY SCENES SPOIL YOUTH TALKS

CANBERRA: A Melbourne unemployment action group yesterday disrupted the opening sessions of the national youth conference for the views of Australian youth led to angry adults or bureaucrats. Earlier, tight security surrounded the Prime Minister, Mr Fraser, when he opened the three-day conference at the Australian National University.

The group, from the Fitzroy-based Action and Resource Centre for Low-Income Families, broke through strict security and entered the conference hall, sending the meeting into turmoil. However, about 30 of the 120-member conference group claimed that they were not allowed to participate. The group claimed that the money spent on the conference was a public relations exercise that could have been better spent on 700 unemployed youth.

The question of representation and, to a lesser extent, the validity of the conference as a forum should be discussed by youth, they also claimed that the topics should be chosen by youth.

But apart from a few boos and chants of "Fraser resign", the demonstration passed without incident.

## Dole group 'raids' meeting

CANBERRA: A Melbourne unemployment action group yesterday disrupted the opening sessions of the National Youth Conference. A small group from the Fitzroy-based Action and Resource Centre for Low-Income Families, broke through strict security and entered the conference hall, sending the meeting into turmoil. The 10 in the group demanded that they be allowed to participate in the conference, claiming the Government-sponsored event was a "public relations exercise" which did not adequately represent unemployed youth.

The question of representation and to a lesser extent, the validity of the conference as a forum for the views of Australian youth, led to angry exchanges between delegates and protesters. Eventually a representative of the unemployed group was allowed to address the group of about 20 of the 120 at the conference. The 120 at the conference stormed out of the hall while the representative spoke.

The action group claimed the demonstration was on bringing on the day of the unemployed group has been in the news for some time. The group said it was not a "public relations exercise" but a "public relations exercise" which did not adequately represent unemployed youth.

The question of representation and to a lesser extent, the validity of the conference as a forum for the views of Australian youth, led to angry exchanges between delegates and protesters. Eventually a representative of the unemployed group was allowed to address the group of about 20 of the 120 at the conference. The 120 at the conference stormed out of the hall while the representative spoke.

Obviously you want to do your thing. I phoned in. If you phoned in and missed out, I'm sorry. If you didn't then why not?" After a brief debate, the Chairman asked the audience to vote on whether or not we would be heard. A clear majority voted against and we took up the chanting again.

An organiser asked us to leave and we said that all we wanted was one speaker for five minutes. The Chairman then suggested that he would close the morning session and those delegates who wished to remain could hear our speaker. The session was closed and about 90 of the 120 delegates stayed - including many of those who had voted against our right to speak.

Our speaker explained why we objected to a conference on youth being controlled by adults and outlined our alternative proposition. The impact was excellent and a lot of people who were against us originally came up and apologised. They asked questions about us and ARC. The organisers then told us that unless we left the police would remove us. We left because we had achieved as much as we could have and it was now up to the conference delegates.

After our departure there was a dramatic change to the agenda of the conference and the main issue became better ways to consult youth. The following resolution was eventually passed by the whole conference:

*"That we recognize the limitations of this National Youth Conference in consulting young people about their views and ask the Government to consider other ways of doing this, with particular consideration being given to utilizing and expanding the local consultation process developed through the Government's Youth Say Project on an ongoing basis."*

It was a virtual endorsement of our views.



# DOWN WITH THE SALVOS

If offending and provoking a reaction is a measure of success then the campaign against the emergency aid policy and practices of the Salvation Army has been a success. But, then, this reaction has been strong enough to end the campaign.

On Tuesday 23rd October 1979 we set out on perhaps our most difficult and ambitious direct action - a confrontation with the Salvation Army.

We picked the issue of emergency aid because it is an issue that immediately affects all low income people. We chose the Salvation Army because they are one of the largest agencies involved in providing emergency aid and because the Government would listen to the views of the Army more so than the views of ARC or the Brotherhood. We thought that if we could change the Army's views we'd have an impact on government policy. Furthermore, all the people of ARC have had experiences of receiving help from the Salvation Army.

We decided to protest outside the Army's Social Welfare Department at 209 Spring Street, Melbourne and we dutifully arrived there at 12.20 - 12 in all. The placards we carried announced:

*Food before religion!*

*The Poor shall prosper!*

*Single Mothers are unemployed people too!*

We had already devised a chant which we used to full effect:

Your undeserving poor  
Are pushed out the door.





After 40 minutes we moved to the City Temple at 69 Bourke Street to brandish the placards and chant.

Perhaps the most disappointing aspect was the lack of media attention. Despite the fact that all newspapers, television and radio stations had been contacted - not one attended the demonstration. Quite obviously, the warning of HSV 7 was felt by all:

*"Why are you demonstrating against the Salvation Army? They are a voluntary agency. They do a lot of good things. How would you like them to demonstrate against you?"*

It was a clear warning that demonstrations against the Salvation Army were not considered newsworthy. Subsequently, this view was confirmed by The Age

asking why we were demonstrating against such a worthy organisation as the Salvation Army. The Age, however, ran a small story. A radio station, 3UZ, was at pains to point out that we were going about it the wrong way and that some people used public relations companies.

On Wednesday 24th October 11 of us went back to the Salvation Army. This time we went straight to the City Temple. The protest was similar in nature and outcome to that held on the previous day. The media ignored us. We hassled the Army, had various discussions with its members and some members of the public.

We were concerned but not deterred by the absence of the media and 10 of us returned once again at Thursday lunchtime. This time we decided to escalate the protest by entering the City Temple. This we did. We proceeded down passageways, up and down stairs, in and out of two small shops, in one entrance and out another entrance. We chanted as we went - a chant which reverberated throughout the building. As we came up to various offices window blinds were pulled down and doors were closed. We called into the office of the Territorial Commander, sat down on the floor, requested an appointment, asked for and were told we didn't "deserve a drink of water." Having made our point, we decided to leave.

We returned to ARC to be confronted with the news that an emergency meeting of Council was being convened to discuss the Salvation Army campaign. The meeting was prompted by a letter of complaint from the then Executive Director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, David Scott. In his letter David stated:

*"The Brotherhood recognises ARC's right to comment and act on matters which affect low-income people.*

*We assume that ARC also recognises the Brotherhood's right to comment on ARC's actions, particularly as they have repercussions for the Brotherhood. It is*

known that the Brotherhood provides most of the funding for ARC, and the letterhead, which you use for social action activities, identifies ARC as an 'independent project in association with the Brotherhood'.

We would question the purpose and desirability of the current campaigns against the Salvation Army and the Brotherhood. I would have thought that it would be more in keeping with ARC's philosophy to concentrate on the more fundamental issues that create the need for the Salvation Army and the Brotherhood to provide money and material aid for low-income people. In the last two years, the relief giving organisations have been working together closely, through VCQSS, to improve their services and to bring about changes in income security that would obviate the need for so much emergency assistance. Your attacks on the Salvation Army and, to a lesser extent, on the Brotherhood, will be harmful to these endeavours.

We would also question these activities from the point of view of their benefit to ARC. It is likely that ARC will be seen as seeking publicity instead of concentrating on changing attitudes and policies which have much more harmful effects on low-income people.

Your criticisms ignore the reality of the situation faced by most welfare organisations and, one would assume, also by ARC. When resources are insufficient to meet demand, some system has to be devised to try and give priority to people who are deemed to be in greatest need.

We have also been asked how many ARC members, and particularly how many of the people demonstrating at the Salvation Army have had direct association with the Salvation Army in recent months. This is a fair question.

The tone of the ARC statement about the Salvation Army is arrogant in some places and can only give unnecessary offence to those who read it. This

*will not help to achieve whatever change ARC may have in mind.*

*We would be interested to know whether these activities are part of a carefully thoughtout strategy because they have consequences for the Brotherhood."*

The Council met and was single-mindedly determined to stop the campaign against the Salvation Army. There was no consideration given to rejecting David Scott's letter as interfering with ARC's independence. There was no consideration given to the different points and queries in his letter. There was no consideration given to what had happened during the campaign - or even a request for an explanation. Instead, after debate about procedures, Council passed a motion forbidding any further action against the Salvation Army until social action guidelines were prepared.

While the action of Council could be criticised, the Council was acting in what it believed to be ARC's own interests and the campaign against the Salvation Army was believed to be against ARC's interests because of the obvious opposition of the Brotherhood. Council acted quickly because it believed quick action was necessary.

The immediate impact of Council's decision, however, was to demoralise and break up the group involved in the campaign. The background to and the aftermath of the Council's decision was the stated opposition by staff and member/non-participants in the campaign, e.g., "You're biting the hand that feeds you. It's bloody ridiculous. There are proper channels.", "You're trying to destroy ARC" and "You'll be excluded as a member". The comments were based on genuinely felt fears about the consequences of the campaign.



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ALTERNATIVE AND RESOURCE CENTRE FOR LOW INCOME FAMILIES

ARC, THE SALVATION ARMY AND EMERGENCY AID - 23rd October, 1979.

The Action And Resource Centre for Low Income Families is protesting against the Emergency Aid Policies of the Social Welfare Department of the Salvation Army.

It is ARC's experience that the Salvation Army has shown a lot of impatience and intolerance towards people seeking their assistance.

Too many people seeking assistance are treated callously by the Salvation Army. There is too little caring and too little sharing. Instead of warmth and understanding, people are subjected to humiliating and intimidating questions:

- How do you spend your money?
- Do you drink?
- How do you budget?
- How many cigarettes do you buy each week?
- How many paches do you buy each week?

The Salvation Army does not like to help people too often and people who are forced to seek assistance too often are sent away.

The Salvation Army Social Welfare Department still believes that there are deserving and undeserving poor, and that even the deserving can't be trusted.

ARC has a policy on Emergency Aid which asserts that Emergency Aid Recipients must be treated with dignity and should automatically receive assistance. The sooner the Salvation Army learns this, the better it is for the Army and Recipients of its assistance.

.. 2

ARC's EMERGENCY AID RULES:

1. Assistance will be in cash.
2. Assistance will be equally available to all people seeking assistance.
3. Assistance will be available on request.
4. Recipients will determine their own needs subject to these rules.
5. Aid will be available on the day of application.
6. These rules will be made available to recipients and will be freely available to the general community.
7. Information required from recipients will be minimised and confidential.

ARC suggests that the Salvation Army should embark on consciousness-raising with users of its services.

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ARC Social Action Group.  
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- In the short-term, we had clearly failed to
- a. Anticipate the Brotherhood's response and the basis of that response.
  - b. Anticipate the Council's reaction to an unfavourable Brotherhood response and the basis of that reaction.
  - c. Appreciate the realistic dependency of the membership on the Salvation Army for support and assistance.

Council was willing to prevent further social action against the Salvation Army because it believed, correctly, that the Brotherhood did not approve. But, then, the Brotherhood was forced to state what is thought - that social action in ARC should preferably be acceptable to the Brotherhood and if it was unacceptable the Brotherhood would have to consider the consequences this might have for ARC.

More seriously, the ARC group which had taken up the campaign has ceased to exist as a social action group and social action in ARC has returned to the ad hoc.

A subsequent meeting with the Salvation Army - at their request - has confirmed our claims that a gulf separates ARC's and the Army's views on emergency aid. They espouse the philosophy of deserving and undeserving poor - varying in estimates of the underserving from "some" to "many". They believe, with the Brotherhood, that there are correct and incorrect ways of behaving. They admit they are in regular contact with the Government about issues such as emergency aid. They said the Salvation Army didn't want to control people's lives. They said the Army was accountable to its donors to ensure that assistance was for necessities and not extras.

We agreed to disagree. We have our views and they have their views. They represent concerned Christians. We represent recipients.

In the long-term, social action guidelines have been subsequently adopted by the ARC Council and their adoption means that the activities undertaken in the campaign against the Salvation Army have been retrospectively justified because the campaign operated within these guidelines. A kind of justification perhaps, but without an effective social action campaign spearheaded by a social action group the guidelines tend to lose their point. We overstepped the line and were pulled back by the Brotherhood and ARC. We had tested the limits of social action.

# THE MEDIA AND THE L.I.P.

If we've got something to say to the community the only way we can get into the media is by putting on a show. We can't just say the political parties are irrelevant, that the policies of the Gas and Fuel Corporation should change and that a National Youth Conference is the wrong way to go about consulting youth. We can say it but the community doesn't hear our views because the media doesn't publish or broadcast our views.

Putting on a show means a vigil, a demonstration and breaking strict police security. But, then, the show itself becomes the story and the substance - our views - remain marginal.

It is ironic that the media treat the low income people as entertainers and our response is to act as entertainers. We resent it but that's the only way we can get access. At least, we are choosing how we entertain the media. In contrast, anti-poverty experts such as Professor Ronald Henderson and Peter Hollingworth don't have to put on a show. They get coverage because they are experts - not entertainers.

But, they also get coverage because they are middle class and because they are not low income people. Journalists are middle class people who have a bureaucratic attitude towards low income people. They don't understand us and they don't try to understand us. They're not sympathetic to what we want to say and how we want to say it. The media want us to relate to them rather than the media relating to us. They don't have the same problem with middle class individuals and organisations.

The people in the media are four kinds - victims, aggressors, deviants and celebrities. For the media



low income people are primarily victims. This victimising of low income people influences the news value of low income people for journalists. Low income people are also aggressors and deviants. The anti-poverty experts are celebrities.

The problem begins when low income individuals and organisations reject the victim label. It begins when low income people don't want to talk and act like victims. It occurs when the victims have views about being victims. It continues when the victims challenge the assumptions and questions of the media.

Journalists find it difficult to relate to low income people talking about the unemployment policies of the Government, tenant management of Housing Commission Estates and income security policies. From low income people they are more interested in the experience of being unemployed, feelings about guards on Housing Commission estates and reactions to questions from field officers.

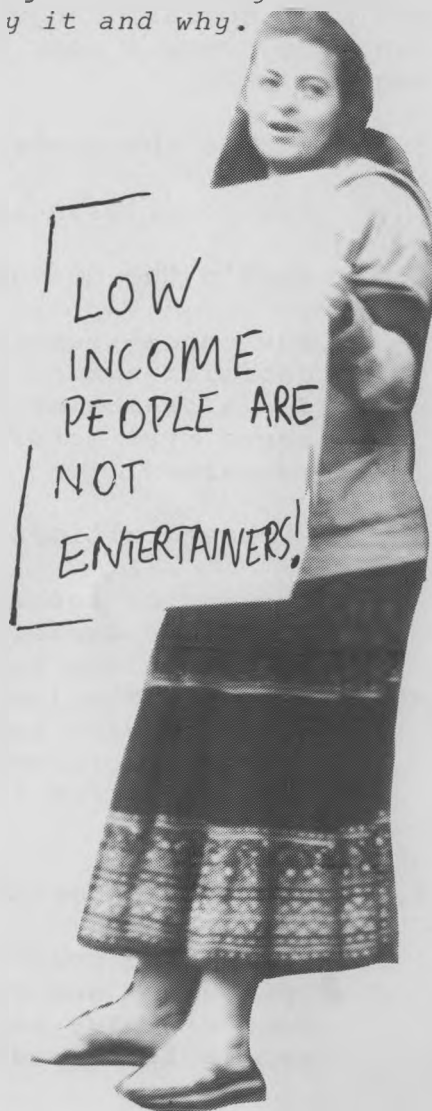
Victims are not supposed to have views about being victims. They are only supposed to have experiences and feelings of being victims. It is the anti-poverty experts who are supposed to have the education, training and qualifications to be able to expertly comment on poverty and the poor.

So far, our challenging of the media has been relatively ineffective. Stories are often neither published nor broadcast because we refuse to speak and act like victims. If we agree to become victims, aggressors and deviants we are undermining ourselves and ARC. We would be confirming the prejudice that low income people are incapable of making their own decisions. We put on a show and the show, rather than the substance, is reported.

The media has been useful - despite itself. While it hasn't communicated our views effectively and relevantly, it has communicated our presence and visibility. It has also helped us in making our

social action initiatives more effective. Without the presence of the media we would not have been able to achieve as much as we wanted to achieve and its presence has conditioned the response to our initiatives. Police have not been called in because our protests have been non-violent, because they would be seen to be non-violent and police action against us would be publicly embarrassing.

*There is no easy solution. The solution lies in community education and political pressure. The media is supposed to have a responsibility to report what is happening and what is being said. They don't report what we say, the way we say it and why.*



# SOCIAL CHANGE AND LOW INCOME PEOPLE.

This paper was prepared by ARC participants at the end of a Social Change Workshop which was held for two hours once a week from 30th April to 13th August, 1979.

1. What's the general issue?

*The powerlessness of low income people.*

2. What's the defined problem?

*Low income people do not have access to decision-making that affects their lives. The decision-making power is the central power to power over information, relationships and resources.*

3. Proposed ultimate solution to the problem.

*Low income people at all primary and secondary levels of decision-making. Real accountability of low income representatives to all low income people. The issues of what constitutes primary and secondary levels of decision-making, what type of representation and what kind of mechanisms for accountability need to be resolved.*

4. Factors hindering resolution of the problem.

*Low income people lack skills, information, confidence and opportunity. Primarily, however, they lack organisation. Low income people lack leadership. Low income people's*

representatives are seen as token representatives. Power groups are threatened by low income people. Some organisations appear to be working for and with low income people but are ultimately working against their interests.

5. Factors helping resolution of the problem.

The establishment and continuation of ARC. ARC is active in the community and has representatives on decision-making bodies (e.g., ACOSS and VCOSS). ARC is a viable organisation representing low income people's interests. ARC maintains contact with low income people through the Activities programs.

6. What are the short-term action possibilities (within 12 months)?

Low income representatives on local, State and Federal Government policy committees. Low income representatives on the policy committees of all political parties. Increased contact with community organisations and groups. Form stronger alliances with low income groups. Increase process of informing and education the community about low income people and issues. Greater use of the media, publications and talks. Maintain grass roots contact with low income people and with their own identity. Build up low income people's organisations. Secure funding from people who agree with your actions. Getting to know about other groups.

7. What are the assumptions behind these possibilities, e.g., conflict and/or mobilisation and influencing elites?

All of these assumptions are involved

8. Who will support and oppose these possibilities?

*Reform groups apparently working for/with low income people but ultimately against. Politicians will oppose real power. Also Public Servants and Big Business.*

9. What are the medium-term action possibilities (within 5 years)?

*Low income people's candidates for State and Federal elections. Change ARC's focus from a centre for low income people to organising a movement of low income people. Low income people on management committees of organisations that have low income people as clients. Employment of indigenous workers at all levels by Government and non-government agencies. An Australia-wide low income people's Congress. The establishment of at least another two organisations run by low income people.*

10. What are the assumptions behind these possibilities, e.g., conflict or consensus, organisation and/or mobilisation and influencing elites?

*The need for ARC to break away from organisational maintenance and institutionalisation and focus on mobilising low income people. The need for ARC and low income people's representatives who are accountable to low income people. Need for representatives to remember what they are there for and who they are representing. Influencing and infiltrating elites.*

11. Who will support and oppose these possibilities?

*Reform groups apparently working for/with low income people but ultimately against. Politicians will oppose real power. Public ~~business~~ business.*

12. What are the long-term action possibilities (within 10 - 15 years)?

*Low income people's political party. Low income people controlling/running community groups. Indigenous workers delivering all services to low income people. Low income people holding key positions in Government.*

13. What are the assumptions behind these possibilities, e.g., conflict or consensus, organisation and/or mobilisation and influencing elites?

*Taking over from elites.*

14. Who will support and oppose these possibilities?

*Reform groups apparently working for/with low income people but ultimately against. Politicians will oppose real power. Also Public Servants and Big Business.*

A second group of ARC and non-ARC participants in the Social Change Workshop prepared the following incomplete social change analysis:

1. The general issue.

*The powerlessness of low income people.*

2. What's the defined problem?

- a. *The danger of low income people "defining" themselves narrowly, and allowing others, e.g., Brotherhood of St Laurence, to "define" them too narrowly, and in ways which seriously reduce the potential for gaining power over relationships, decisions, resources and information, e.g., ignoring the fact that all low income people are members of a larger group of working people.*

- b. The problem of gaining power over the 'structural determinants' of low income, i.e., in terms of general social provision, (laws, regulations, allowances, etc.), and of social institutions, (e.g., school, workplace).
- c. That low income people underestimate their potential power.
- d. The problem of low income people financing their organisation and activities.
- e. The increasing numbers of the low income group among working people.
- f. The relatively low public visibility of the low income group.
- g. What is/are the unit/s with which ARC identifies, to which it supplies services, and from which it gains strength, power and resources?
- h. That many low income people are effectively depoliticized by the everyday pressures of living.

### 3. Proposed ultimate solution to problem.

- a. Take mystery out of professional services.
- b. Take mystery out of the public welfare and education bureaucracies, including the reform of appeal provisions.
- c. Redistribution of income.
- d. Social control of the means of production of goods and of many services.
- e. Decentralised control, rural reconstruction.



- f. *Wider available choice in access to and use of basic services, e.g., education, housing, etc.*
- g. *The use of appropriate technologies.*
- h. *Establish and maintain links with other progressive forces in housing, education, health, technology, etc.*

A third group, with ARC and non-ARC people at the workshop prepared this report.

# 1. What is the defined problem?

*Don't have the control of resources that affect the lives of low income people. Low income people systematically excluded from decision-making structures in society and all aspects militate against low income people having control. Groups are fragmented and split off from each other.*

# 2. What is the solution?

*There are a number of solutions:*

- a. *Do nothing: but on the basis that low income people understand their oppression and choose to withdraw and not to question their lot, accept that their position is where they should rightfully be, e.g., untouchables in India. Perhaps this could be the description of the Government's attitude to 'blame' low income people for their lot in life, basically to say this is where they should be - and people accept this.*
- b. *Redistribution of Wealth: radical solution involving structural changes within society. Would point to equal wages for all jobs, e.g., which would then develop education for*

*its intrinsic worth, and would lead to a situation of open access for training. Equal access to material goods would give low income people equal control of capital which we presume would lead to equal power.*

- c. Wealthy have less wealth and low income people have rise in their income: this is basically the reformist position.*
- d. Low income people create their own interdependent community: Low income people have no access to means of production. So should produce own food, clothes and shelter. Hence withdraw from established markets and services. Can't beat Capitalism.*

After discussion, it was decided that a blending of alternatives (c.) and (d.) would be the most appropriate and realizable solution. Bring groups of low income people together, and get them working together. This will allow people a diversity of courses of action. For example, some people would prefer not to be involved in social action per se, so let them be involved in the development of co-operative services. We are faced with the problem of how to break down the individualistic ethic and encourage the development of the communal ethic. Perhaps something like a food co-operative would pave the way for people to get used to the idea of sharing.

Small communities based on this sharing could exist within the system. Parts of these groups would be involved in social action which would be to modify the existing system rather than wasting time on trying to radically change it, while others are developing these co-operative ventures. It's sort of like a marriage between Jim Cairns and Emma Goldman. Technology can be used to facilitate operations of the small communities. There was some talk about the structures which exist ostensibly at the moment to localise

decision-making, but which need greater development, e.g., education department, community health centres. Big battles, like fighting the nuclear industry would have to be done on a local level first, and then develop co-operative links between communities.

- \* ARC's professional Social Policy Worker conducted 15 two hours a week Social Change Workshop between 30th April and 13th August, 1979. The emphasis of the workshop was on relating personal experience of social change of participants to the general experience of social change. The workshop blended theory and practice. In brief, the sessions covered individual and organisational barriers to social change, social change and social problems (e.g., poverty, media, and power), social change strategies, visions and possibilities. Over the last three sessions the workshop divided into three groups and began preparing three social change strategies for low income people. Non-ARC participants who contributed towards these strategies were David Brabet; Gil Freeman and Helen Szoke.

# MOBILISING AND ORGANISING LOW INCOME PEOPLE.

We have little or no choice about anything and are mainly caught up with how to survive on a day to day basis. Our incomes are inadequate. We are not good at forming relationships with other people - in particular with those that are seen as outsiders. We lack resources, information and organisational skills which would enable us to improve our situations.

We find it difficult to look beyond our own immediate situation and to look at the root causes of our situation. We have been conditioned to being dependent on the welfare system which is structured in such a way that it creates dependency for those who find themselves seeking assistance from the system. We end up as victims of a bureaucratic society and believing that our situation is our own fault. The welfare system strips us of any remaining dignity and sense of worth. It is difficult for us to be independent of such a system when it is not structured to create independence and when its policies do not allow for independence.

The friends of low income people are those individuals and groups who have a true understanding of what it is to be a low income person, understand the needs and abilities of low income people to be responsible for their own lives, have a common aim and identify with low income people, are committed to enabling low income people to be responsible for their own lives, form working relationships with low income people and share their information, resources and skills, and concentrate on changing the system and not on blaming the victims.

The enemies of low income people are those who support a bureaucratic system which doesn't cater for the real needs of low income people. The enemies of low income people deny that low income people have a vital contribution to make to society, they do not allow low income people to participate in the real decision-making processes and only give low income people token access to decision-making.

Many who claim to be friends of low income people are really enemies. Words are cheap but action is expensive. Many people support us in theory but not in practice. Welfare and political decision-makers exclude low income people who they claim to be helping.

There is a need to mobilise and organise the low income community - a power base which empowers the low income community. It should be a power base for the low income community and not just individuals. It should be an organisation and movement rather than a geographical centre such as ARC. At the same time, geographical power bases are also necessary. It could be an ARC, neighbourhood centres or people's homes.

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There is a lot of potential in low income people being agents for social change. There will be resistance to this from inside and outside the low income community. Government and welfare individuals don't want to know and don't want to do anything about social change. Many low income people like being dependent because they've been conditioned to be dependent. They're comfortable they don't have to be responsible for themselves and they're afraid of the unknown. We can achieve change if we fight for change and are willing to accept the consequences of fighting for change.

# WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED AND WHERE TO NEXT.

The State election campaign was a beginning. Since then we have:

- Followed up with the politicians as a both way process of creating political awareness among low income people and also educating politicians on issues that affect low income people. We've learnt a lot more about politicians and ourselves. We're not sure what the politicians have learnt.
- Increased use of the media and developed skills in using media and also established media contacts. The more we have used the media the more skilled we have become in using the media. We realise, however, it will take a long time before the media recognise that the views of low income people are credible and newsworthy. It will take a long time before the media sees low income people as other than just case histories.
- Starting making ACOSS more responsive in its decision-making structure to the needs and demands of low income people.
- Campaigned against the failure of the Gas & Fuel to change its deserving/undeserving attitude towards low income people.
- Broken through strict police security to non-violently disrupt a National Youth Conference organised in Canberra by the Commonwealth Government.

The lessons of these experiences are several:

1. Don't take any individual or organisation for granted. Don't assume that they're either for or against low income people.
2. Be prepared to take risks and accept the consequences. If you don't offend people you've failed. Don't be afraid of success.
3. Work together as a team. Don't allow yourself to be divided. Support each other. Don't be bought off.
4. Stick to your principles and your points. Only compromise when you have no other alternative.
5. Follow through to exploit and captialise on your gains and successes. Don't let gains and successes get away.

How far the campaign will go depends on the future committment of ARC, its staff and members to social action and social change. Whatever happens, the value and lessons of the Low Income People's Campaign remain. At present, we are working towards becoming an action and pressure group and building a network of community support contacts. Each success or setback opens up new areas and possibilities for future change. Social change holds the future for us all. The only way we can make a change is to fight for the rights we think are ours, for it is we the people who have to live with whatever outcome that arises. The future can be made ours if we show society that we want a future.





